



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Afterword

Citation for published version:

Stanley, L 2020, 'Afterword: Writing lives, fictions, and the postcolonial', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 55, no. 3, pp. 469-479. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989418802610>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1177/0021989418802610](https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989418802610)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Journal of Commonwealth Literature

Publisher Rights Statement:

Stanley, L, Afterword: Writing lives, fictions, and the postcolonial, Journal of Commonwealth Literature. Copyright © 2019 SAGE Publications. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Afterword: Writing lives, fictions, and the postcolonial

Liz Stanley, University of Edinburgh

In *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2019, Special issue on “Illuminating Lives: The Biographical Impulse in Postcolonial Literatures”

Abstract

This essay reflects on the writing of lives and fictions in a South African context in light of the contents of this special issue, and draws parallels with some of the approaches adopted by the contributors. It discusses biography, autobiography, diaries, letters, and testimonies by or about Steve Biko, Nelson Mandela, Eugene Marais, Njube son of Lobengula, Cecil Rhodes, and Olive Schreiner, and problematizes some of the key terms in thinking about postcolonial literatures. In doing so, it explores interconnections between the factual and the fictive in different forms of life writing, the expanded boundaries of biographizing, performances, and transformations of the self, the use of fictions to tell truths, issues with representation and referentiality, the appeal of a return to “the facts” in some circumstances, the position of readers, and how the relationship between “then” and “now” informs writing practices. The conclusion draws on Olive Schreiner’s literary credo to propose that an alliance

between writers and readers should be part of reconfiguring the biographical impulse in postcolonial literatures.

Keywords

Autobiography; biofiction; biography; fictions; life writing; postcolonial literatures; South Africa; writing lives

Coming to terms

Postcolonialism, postcoloniality, the postcolony, and associated terms are much invoked, well-theorized, and provide powerful rallying points. While their resonance is strong, their meanings can shift between different positions, for they are sometimes used to stand for different colonizations, at dissimilar points in the (post)colonial process, distinctive impacts on people's lives, and variant ways in which these lives are lived out. Much thought is therefore needed about how the writing of lives — located in or heralding from different (post)colonies, and having their own cultural traditions for the representation of lives and histories — should be handled. This is the central concern of the special issue on “Illuminating Lives”, with its contributors approaching the topic in a range of ways that mainly interconnect but perhaps inevitably at certain points disconnect with my own, as I write from the perspective of a cultural sociologist rather than a literary scholar. The purpose of this Afterword is to draw together and in

some respects to move beyond the specific concerns of the individual contributions to the special issue, in raising more general points, exploring ideas and issues that occur across these contributions, and also introducing some themes and topics that arise about other contexts, times, places, and literatures.

The “biographical impulse” that the special issue interrogates intertwines with the confessional, narrative, and deconstructionist turns and the complications these raise with regard to postcolonial literatures. The contributors investigate the relationship between facts and fictions in telling and writing lives in varied ways, with the cumulative effect being that they demonstrate that the idea and practice of biofiction has wider resonance than the (quasi)genre given this name (Lackey, 2016a, 2016b). This term indeed can act as a leitmotif for wider examination of these issues within the broad frame of life writing and this is discussed in some detail across the various contributions to the special issue. My own work as a cultural sociologist has focused on theorizing auto/biography, testimonies, and letters, and also monuments, memorials, and public remembrance, in connection with South Africa. As a result, there are interesting differences as well as similarities with how biofiction and biopolitics are investigated by other special issue contributors, because they mainly deal with other (post)colonies, but also because there are different authorial concerns and ways of thinking about potential readers. These matters form a thread running through what follows.

The factual, the fictive, and troubling boundaries

My point of departure is the idea of the postcolony, complicated not only in political but also ontological terms. If South Africa is a postcolony, when did it become so and in what respects? Much Afrikaner nationalist activity from 1948 to the later 1980s went into claiming the nation was postcolonial because the Boer/Afrikaner majority had wrested power from both the English-speaking population and the residual British imperial presence, an endeavour signed when it became the Union of South Africa in 1910, sealed when it left the Commonwealth in 1960, and delivered in 1948 with the formation of an apartheid government.

However, the problem as seen by Afrikaner nationalism started, not with colonialism itself, in which the movement was implicated, but with the British imperial presence symbolized by the arch-imperialist Cecil Rhodes, and in particular the South African War of 1899–1902 and its concentration camps. With regards to the many life writings that appeared post-1902, testimonies, memoirs, and diaries about these events were couched in liberationist terms, produced mainly by people active within ascendant Afrikaner nationalist politics of the 1900s through to the 1940s (Stanley, 2006; Stanley and Dampier, 2006, 2007). They were white, and fiercely so; their voices were valorized and others reduced to silence, with a variety of fictive devices used in producing a clear-cut version of what had occurred and its implied justification of the racial order being enforced.

As a result of this cultural and political response, there has been a longstanding tradition in South Africa of life writing by the dominant section of its white population. This has foregrounded a nationalist viewpoint on “the facts” by interweaving these with fictions; and, through the activities of state historians, this largely testimony-based life writing has been interlaced with “history” according to a nationalist agenda (Stanley, 2006). Because of this and related political factors, there has been a dearth until relatively recently of comparable writing from the black majority, although this is rapidly changing. The result is a difference with many other postcolonies, including those that other special issue contributors are writing about, for elsewhere the writing of lives in ways that blur genre boundaries has often been part of the cultural–political armoury of the colonized majority, rather than the colonizing minority.

It is complicated, though. Many Boer or Afrikaner people suffered grievously because of the South African War; and while perhaps most may have been reprehensible in today’s political and ethical terms, that should not prevent recognition of people’s suffering. Justice should not be reserved only for people we approve of, and “other” lives too should be represented with understanding. This is an important ethical matter. It is also a testing one because such an ethics has an awkward relationship with the politics of the situation, and there are troubling consequences regarding whose lives are written and how, and the role of fictionalizing in this. In his article on “Writing the Biofictive” for this special issue, Stephen Clingman (20XX: XX)

points out that biofiction becomes a new form of knowledge in a postcolonial context, in this case the Caribbean and a broader Black Atlantic framing. This is achieved because biofiction shifts the ground of epistemological claims-making and engages with the operations of power by following alterity, difference, and fragmented lives. But as the rather different case of South Africa before 1994 indicates, not all postcolonial contexts or all biofictions are politically “good”.

Putting substance to present-day postcolonial thought means among other things recognizing these troubling complexities. (Post)coloniality and controversies about its character are long-standing, being pointed out in earlier analyses by Frantz Fanon (1963/1961), Aimé Césaire (1972/1950), and Albert Memmi (1965/1957) among others, and they have also received many contemporary discussions (as with the debates covered in Mongia’s [1996] edited collection). The view that race and racism map onto a binary colour-line is something that, for instance, Somali migrants on the receiving end of violence and murder in present-day South Africa might not accept (Stanley, 2018: 207–27). Relatedly, thinking there are no white postcolonies worth speaking of is something people resident in, for example, countries across the former USSR might take issue with. And there is also the problematic idea that there have never been any black empires and resistance to, for example in the context South Africa, the idea that the early nineteenth-century reign of King Shaka spearheading the rise of Zulu expansionist conquest was in fact a variant of imperialism.

However, some principles can still be derived: strive not to homogenize, and instead delimit knowledge claims, ground terms in the specifics of particular (post)colonial experiences, and recognize exceptions to assumed rules. Also, be clear about what is being proposed about the complicated relationship between the representation of lives on the one hand, the lived realities of subjects on the other, and the role of fictions in mediating between them. There are in addition performative aspects to this, involving the transformation of self as subject into an object, as Suzanne Scafe (20XX) points out in focusing on multiple performances of self by Ellen and William Craft, who were born in an American slavery context. Many (ex-)slave narratives were at one level a tool for the appropriation of people's lives by a white liberal counter-establishment; but at another, narrators recognized that their accounts could be self-subverted and turned to their own, different purposes. Performance can involve reversals, transformations, nuances, as well as giving the colonial oppressor what they wanted; and fictions can come in more or less factive guises.

Biographizing and using fictions to tell truths

The novels and other writings by J. M. Coetzee are much under the spotlight with regards to fictionalizing. The issues raised so far and their continuing reverberations surface monumentally in much of his work. They are, however, subterranean to Coetzee's (1994) novel *The Master of Petersburg* discussed in Marie Herbillon's article

entitled “Rewriting Dostoevsky” in the special issue (20XX). The article pertinently explores this book as a reflection on biography and its relationship with censorship and writing and suggests that a new genre of “autobiographical historical fiction” is being developed in it. The novel’s criss-crossing of the factual and fictional aspects of how a biographer tells the tale perhaps also points in a disguised way to the biopolitics of Coetzee’s native South Africa, as well as censorship and biography more generally.

However, the fictionalizing and blurring of “the facts” in biographical writings by another internationally-known South African, Nelson Mandela (1918–2013), remains even more subterranean. Indeed, to say fictionalizing and Mandela in the same breath might be considered heresy by some. But he says himself that he does this. *Conversations with Myself* (2010) is presented as a book by Nelson Mandela, because it is composed of things he wrote or said. It is actually a biography of a kind, a selected compilation of his words made by other people that adds up to a partial interpretation of a life, a quasi-fictional one. The fictionalizing goes deeper though, for in one of its extracts Mandela (2010: 209–10) proposes that things contrary to ANC strategy should not be spoken or written of. He also mentions writing for the political record of the struggle and so self-censoring what and how he wrote, and the need for others too to do this because of the greater cause being served.

But while such things may appear the result of the extreme circumstances of the struggle against apartheid, and were certainly shaped by this, they are also done in more

ordinary and routine situations. People often fail to say or write the things they feel; they shape what they say for the circumstances, and expect others to do the same. So where does this leave the artifices of biographers? There are some limitations here, not least because of how biography, fiction, and life writing relate to postcolonial thinking within the prevailing imaginary. An example here is that in her essay Maria Cristina Fumagalli (20XX: XX) notes that Derek Walcott had to leave the Caribbean to be able to write outside its confines but retained many connections with the region (offering an interesting counterpoint to Coetzee leaving South Africa). Fumagalli also points out that apparently binary terms, like memory and imagination, past and present, reality and fiction, and so on, are actually blurred, not only in writing but also in visual representation.

Biography, representing the life of another, can be viewed as a third order activity, with biographers involved in the biographizing of subjects who have already biographized themselves and others, in association with other people who have biographized similarly. It is a collective enterprise. Rather than *either* fictions, *or* factual lives, *or* something between, mostly biographies are amalgams, so “and also” is more appropriate than “either/or”. Life as it is lived is not the only concern that biography has; it is also a matter of following a narrative line using the most telling fictive or factive devices. As Mandela said about his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994) — famously the product of collective activity involving ANC colleagues in

deciding what should and should not be written —, he was not the angel that it depicted (Sampson, 2011: 582).

Resistance and representation

Writing lives in autobiographies or biographies, as well as scholarly work which writes about these writings about lives, involves a Catch-22 situation when done under the sign of postcolonialism. Postcoloniality implies resistance; writing about such matters implies writing for a readership in a market through publication; and seeing this as resistance is just one part of the picture, for published writing remains a commodity in the prevailing system of monetary and other exchanges (Huggan, 2001; Brouillette, 2007). But life writing has many variants, including biography, autobiography, auto/biography, biographical fiction, biofiction, fictionalizing and factionalizing, and fictive interventions among others. These cross-hatching terms signify writing practices that dispute generic purity and fracture any remaining notions of ontological coherence and homogeneity, neither of which characterize the (post)colonial experience but can sometimes be found in representations of such. Writing about a different postcolonial context, Australia, Catherine Padmore and Kelly Gardiner (20XX) explore two rather different biofictions, by Eleanor Dark and Ernestine Hill. In particular, they comment that Dark's book changes the reader's position in relation to the text and so alters the gaze that readers place on the ensuing narrative: the reader is in a position of being on a

shore watching Europeans arrive in Australia, rather than being a European arriving. This is a strategy which, not just in relation to first encounters but more widely, can potentially at least disrupt and overturn and not just trouble the assumptions and identifications of readers.

There can also be fractures on both sides of the colonizer–colonized relationship. Born in Pretoria, Eugene Marais (1871–1936) worked as a journalist, qualified as a lawyer, “vanished” into Bohemian London, lived in rural South Africa, published naturalist observations about baboons, ants, and other creatures, practised briefly as a lawyer, lived mainly on fluctuating share income, is best known as a nationalist writer and poet of considerable stature, and is acclaimed, and problematized, as an Afrikaner hero. Marais was one of 13 children. His eldest sister married a Niemeyer son, with the Niemeyers like the Marais part of a tight-knit network of Afrikaner families. Then a Niemeyer daughter married a Findlay son, with the Findlays being another large although English-speaking family, with their Presbyterian religious affiliations bringing them close to the Dutch Reformed Church beliefs held by these other families. The large Marais, Niemeyer, and Findlay families wrote countless letters and their lives closely intertwined with each other, with Eugene Marais part of this. Read his poems and stories, follow his naturalist observations, consider the close family networks, and it is as though a different Eugene Marais exists in each. A biography by Leon Rousseau (1982/1974) suggests that Marais became unable to tell the difference

between his life and the multiple fictions he spun about it. In the then-dominant tradition of biography in Afrikaans, Rousseau's foreword states its aim "to create a readable story [...] to be read as a novel or *roman de vie* rather than a scientific biography" (1982/1974: i). Playing with fictions has been around for a long time in both art and life; and on occasion, as here, it has served a now-disreputable nationalism.

Standing back from its detail, Rousseau's biography both does and does not represent Marais as an Afrikaner hero and overall sees him in demotic terms. Heroes are created from simplified representations, while lives have to be lived in their complicated messiness. Rousseau shows that Marais was a man of contradictory parts, injected morphine from age 20 onwards and lived his life around its availability, was a committed nationalist, wrote extraordinarily good poems and essays, and later shot himself. Food for thought, including by comparison with portrayals of other very different national figures whose lives are usually rendered in heroic terms. But it is what the people themselves, and subsequently their biographers, do with these contradictory parts — which all living and breathing people have — that is the nub.

Biographies of Nelson Mandela comment about contradictory aspects of his character and the performative aspects of its representation by himself as well as by others (Boehmer, 2008: 181; Sampson, 2011). But Marais fell apart, while Mandela against all the odds pulled himself back together. There is also the role of biographizing to consider, with the demotic and the heroic modes differing in how they situate the

subject. Re-enter the fact and fiction relationship, with Madhu Krishnan (20XX) exploring a Kenyan context for this special issue, in which readers too are implicated, not just writers, and where “epistemophilia” is involved in the way that readers are anticipated in producing particular writings as they are invited to consume the biofictional product.

The writer and the readers

In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1955/1942), Albert Camus portrays the burden of history’s contradictions as needing to be lived out daily and envisions people endlessly pushing these burdens uphill. However, while writing lives in all its variants is neither inherently an active resistance nor inherently anything else, it *does* foreground those contradictions and positions people’s lives in the particular contexts in which they lived. Consequently life writing also points up the importance of the writer, their location, the time in which they were writing, and the receptivity or otherwise of a readership. Donald Woods’ *Biko* (1978) was published chronologically close in time to the 1974 Marais biography but is otherwise very different, including the fact that it was written for very different groups of readers. Steve Biko (1946–1976), a leader of black resistance, was tortured and murdered by South African security forces. Woods was Biko’s friend and his book starts with the words “In memoriam” and the presentation of a litany of people murdered in detention under the apartheid regime (Woods, 1978: 9–11). Woods

remarks that he considered presenting the book as fiction to get it published but concluded that its facts were too important to be disguised to avoid South African state reprisals, as well as to be marketed in this way (1978: 16).

Woods describes his book as a “personal testimony to Steve Biko” (1978: 14) and the volume therefore indicts the apartheid regime and those who served it, focusing on the political context, Biko’s harrowing murder, and the state’s stage-management of the inquest into his death. Confined under banning laws, Woods published the book in the teeth of threatened security force reprisals. It shows the intertwining of his political story with Biko’s and includes attempts made by the regime to kill him to shut him up before he and his family were smuggled out of the country. Such were the times, and the book can be read as more of a testimony to friendship in those times and the intertwining of lives than a biography of a “spotlight on a particular individual” kind. Times change. Xolela Mangcu’s *Biko: A Life* (2013), published some 35 years later, investigates Steve Biko’s development of Black Consciousness ideas and emphasizes political organizations and their activities, and the cooperative relationships that went into the making of Black Consciousness thought, as well as Biko’s individual activism.

However, if life writing requires the tools of creative nonfiction and the use of fictive devices in its writing practices, then Mangcu’s biography fits the brief by creatively rethinking likely occurrences and characters. This contrasts with Woods’ personal account, which asserts itself as a fully factual record of what actually

happened. As already indicated, there were good political reasons for this, around the importance of insisting that violence and oppression had really happened, with Biko's torture and murder the tip of an iceberg of such things. For Woods, problematizing the factual and embracing the fictional was not a best choice strategy in this political context. Mangcu's biography of Biko is more fictive than Woods' factual auto/biography of intertwined lives, however, and this is perhaps a sign of how much things have changed in South Africa over the period between these two books being published. But is this the product of the different times in which they wrote, the different ways they see fictions, the ways they deal with the biography and autobiography relationship, the different writers that they are? Perhaps it is a case of what goes around comes around, for as is indicated in the interview with Caryl Phillips conducted by the editors Bénédicte Ledent and Daria Tunca for this issue, all (non-)genres have their limitations and the facticity of actual lives can sometimes have more power and resonance in a writing context than fictive strategies for representing people and their life circumstances.

Life writing, auto/biography, biography, autobiography, biofiction, biographical fiction, fictionalized lives, fictive devices: all the different genres and their boundary crossings swirl about each other. As well as the welcome complexities, there are also uncomfortable issues to confront. The role of the fictive within the different forms of life writing should certainly be acknowledged and the resulting experimentalism in

writing practices valued. But it is also important to recognize that in violent and oppressive contexts adopting strategies which fracture and dissolve the facticity of lives and the events that impinge on them can have unwanted consequences. In particular, these strategies may diminish the fact that the oppressions and violence that many experience have a factual character: such things really happen. This is what Donald Woods was grappling with, in preferring the risks in publishing a personal factual account, to reducing these by presenting his book and the facts it contains as a fiction.

“Then” and the (un)acceptable

There is a tension between evaluating a life in that person’s own context, back “then”, and recognizing that this is done from the perspective of “now”. There may be things about “them then” that are unaccountable or unacceptable for “us now”. That said, it is important to remember that such “now” assessments are based on partial representations of selective aspects of a life once lived, and so it is always complicated. The issues here regarding representation and the “then” and “now” aspect come to the fore in Russell McDougall’s article “Imperial and Postcolonial Fictions of Pauline Bonaparte” and its discussion of the representational layers involved in thinking about historical accounts of Pauline Bonaparte in Saint-Domingue and elsewhere in the Caribbean, including through its emphasis on history as inside, not outside, the realm of representation and ideology.

These issues are writ large with regard to Cecil Rhodes (1853–1902). From the 1880s through to his death, whenever the unacceptable enters the frame in what became South Africa and Zimbabwe, then Rhodes is usually not far behind. A colossus in corruption and dirty-dealing, in charming and flattering, and doing and promising whatever it took to get whatever he wanted, many letters written by his major critic Olive Schreiner (1855–1920) (and published in their entirety on the website *Olive Schreiner Letters Online*) describe him as having looked good and evil in the face and willingly chosen evil. How does one get a purchase on Rhodes, for he had as many admirers and followers as critics and opponents, and should the ethics and politics of “now” or “then” predominate? Understanding the man and those times, however, requires treating the admirers, not as dopes or dupes, but as having what they thought were good reasons for responding as they did, with some of these people being Olive Schreiner’s mother, favourite sister, elder brother, and other relatives.

Moreover, if the views of “now” are supreme, the question arises as how to respond to some unpublished letters to Rhodes in which the writer abases himself. These letters are by the youthful Njube (1880–1960), deposed heir of the last Matabele King, Lobengula, who was defeated by Rhodes in the bloody invasion of what is now Zimbabwe (and they are provided on the second of the websites referenced in this discussion, *Whites Writing Whiteness*). How Rhodes responded to Njube’s letters is not known, but Gordon Le Seuer, Rhodes’ principal secretary, wrote that Njube was a

clown who performed for visitors and described him using the “N word”. If thinking about these letters in the terms of “now” takes precedence, Njube’s letters are discomfortingly abject; and if the terms of “then” do, either he can be seen contemptuously, as by the racist Le Seuer, or in his own terms as behaving appropriately towards an older, more powerful man who had conquered and supplanted the former Matabele ruler.

But then again, if “then” holds sway, the conduct of the followers of Rhodes, including the appalling Le Seuer as well as the admiring members of the Schreiner family, should perhaps be treated with the same contextual understanding. Then and now are locked together in a kind of perpetual motion machine with enormous consequences for how lives and relationships are understood and represented, and consequently the past is never quite past because of its reverberations in the present. And as the Nigerian novelist Chika Unigwe shows (20XX) in relation to the originally Nigerian autobiographer and abolitionist Olaudah Equiano, there are no easy or straightforward answers for writers of biofiction as well as readers. Not judging the (fictive, factive) past using twenty-first century values, a good thing in the abstract, also runs the risk of almost approving its political and ethical ills.

Ordinary readers and postcolonial lives

How are writers of (fictoid, factional) lives situated in relation to the lives they represent? Less often asked are questions about who their readers are and where readers are located in relation to the writing being discussed. The reader sometimes seems elided, with little concession to their particular positionality. It is the subject and the writer of a subject's life who count. An ordinary reader, a common reader, reads these different layers of a writer, representations, a subject, and the subject living their life, often without finding much recognition of the fact that they too are present, doing this reading. While the strategy is to empower postcolonial lives by stressing fractures and complexities, nonetheless it risks disempowering readers who themselves may be living (post)colonial lives.

Is it a case, not of the death of the author, but the death of the reader? And can a balance be achieved? Delphine Munos's essay for this special issue "Tell it Slant" is deeply engaged with the question of reader positionality in the different readings that can be made of a text, when it comes to Hanif Kureishi's exploration of three unpublished novels by his father, who was from India/Pakistan. Munos puts the idea of "biographical authenticity" under the spotlight, along with notions of authorship and readership. She also comments that writers need to be able to deal with the full range of topics and not be confined to those seen as "minority" ones. The idea of reading "slantwise" has also been drawn on in the many rereadings that critical scholarship has made of the "facts" and "histories" produced in apartheid South Africa, and this of

course echoes a phrase in an Emily Dickinson (1998: 1263) poem also noted in the essay by Delphine Munos (20XX). A slantwise rereading in an oblique way evokes the truth that the artifices of a text disguise and put the onus on the reader to actively interrogate and reread by turning the gaze to these artifices and ironizing their claims about facts and lives.

Writing to reconfigure the biographical impulse

A variation in respect of writing is found in the literary credo prefacing Olive Schreiner's novel, *The Story of an African Farm* (2008/1883: xxxix–xl). This credo invokes life as a play in mid-course, with actors arriving and departing unexpectedly, unanticipated happenings occurring, characters going missing, and the curtain coming down when events are in mid-flow. Schreiner distinguishes two ways of writing about this: the method of the mainstream novel with its important happenings and neat plotlines, versus the method of the life we all live. This method places a requirement on the writer and, while it might superficially be seen as a call to realism, it positions authors and their audiences as both on the same, creative side of the limelight, with the so-called realist writers of the day criticized by Schreiner for their actually unrealistic attention to consistency and order.

Schreiner's credo has implications for writing about lives and the role of fictions in this. The credo permeates her writing practices, including her rejection of biography

as a mistaken individualism, and her “method of life” approach to characterization and plot across her novels (Stanley, 2002). It predates present-day postcolonial thinking about fractured lives and fictions in different forms of life writing, although it is an element within her own gradual development of a critique of imperialism and its inequities; and this went hand in hand with her search for writing practices that would compose a cultural and political alternative. A notable aspect is that it establishes an alliance between the audience (or readers) and the writer, rather than a separation; both together, witnessing the action, struggling to make sense of it. Its task is shared by the contributors to “Illuminating Lives”, in troubling and helping to reconfigure the biographical impulse in postcolonial literatures in the different contexts they explore.

Acknowledgements

The UK’s ESRC funded my research on the letters and papers of Olive Schreiner (RES-062-23-1286) and of Whites Writing Whiteness (ES J022977/1). A British Academy small grant funded research on the records and the monuments and memorials of the concentration camps of the South African War. Their support is gratefully acknowledged. My thanks to the South African archives, libraries and other organizations in which I have carried out research over the last 20 years. I am grateful to the reviewers and editors for helpful critical comments which I have endeavoured to make full use of.

References

- Boehmer E (2008) *Nelson Mandela: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brouillette S (2007) *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Camus A (1955/1942) *The Myth of Sisyphus*. O'Brien J (trans) New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Césaire A (1972/1950) *Discourse on Colonialism*. Pinkham J (trans) New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Clingman S (20XX) Writing the biofictive: Caryl Phillips and *The Lost Child*. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XX(XX): XX–XX.
- Coetzee JM (1994) *The Master of Petersburg*. London: Secker & Warburg.
- Dickinson E (1998) *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Franklin R (ed) New Haven: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Fanon F (1963/1961) *The Wretched of the Earth*. Farrington C (trans) New York: Grove Press.

- Fumagalli MC (20XX) “Not walled facts, their essence”: Derek Walcott’s *Tiepolo’s Hound* and Camille Pissarro. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XX(XX): XX–XX.
- Herbillon M (20XX) Rewriting Dostoevsky: JM Coetzee’s *The Master of Petersburg* and the perverted truths of biographical fiction. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XX(XX): XX–XX.
- Huggan G (2001) *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. London: Routledge.
- Lackey M (ed) (2016a) *Biographical Fiction: A Reader*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Lackey M (2016b) Locating and defining the bio in biofiction. *a/b: Auto/ Biography Studies* 31(1): 3–10.
- Ledent B and Tunca D (20XX) “A growth to understanding”: An interview with Caryl Phillips about biographical fiction. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XX(XX): XX–XX.
- Mandela N (1994) *Long Walk to Freedom*. London: Little, Brown.
- Mandela N (2010) *Conversations with Myself*. Johannesburg: Macmillan.
- Mangu X (2013) *Biko: A Life*. London: IB Tauris.
- McDougall R (20XX) Imperial and postcolonial fictions of Pauline Bonaparte. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XX(XX): XX–XX.
- Memmi A (1965/1957) *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Greenfield H (trans) Boston: Beacon Press.

Mongia P (ed) (1996) *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. London: Arnold.

Munos D (20XX) "Tell it slant": Postcoloniality and the fiction of biographical authenticity in Hanif Kureishi's *My Ear at His Heart: Reading My Father*. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XX(XX): XX–XX.

The Olive Schreiner Letters Online (2012) Available at: <http://www.oliveschreiner.org> (accessed 13 July 2018).

Padmore C and Gardiner K (20XX) Writing Bennelong: The cultural impact of early Australian biofictions by Eleanor Dark and Ernestine Hill. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XX(XX): XX–XX.

Rousseau L (1982/1974) *The Dark Stream: The Story of Eugene N Marais*. Rousseau L (trans) Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers.

Sampson A (2011) *Mandela: The Authorised Biography*. London: Harperpress.

Scafe S (20XX) Performing Ellen: Mojisola Adebayo's *Moj of the Antarctic: An African Odyssey* (2008) and *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (1860). *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XX(XX): XX–XX.

Schreiner O (2008/1883) *The Story of an African Farm*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stanley L (2002) *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman: Olive Schreiner's Social Theory*. Durham: Sociology Press.

Stanley L (2006) *Mourning Becomes... Post/Memory and the Concentration Camps of the South African War*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Stanley L (2018) *The Racialising Process: Whites Writing Whiteness in Letters, South Africa 1770s-1970s*. Edinburgh: X Press.

Stanley L and Dampier H (2006) Simulacrum diaries: Time, the moment of writing and the diaries of Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo. *Life Writing* 3 (1): 25–52.

Stanley L and Dampier H (2007) Cultural entrepreneurs, proto-nationalism and women's testimony writings: From the South African War 1899/1902 to 1948. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33 (3): 501–19.

Unigwe C (20XX) *The Black Messiah: Writing Equiano*. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XX(XX): XX–XX.

Whites Writing Whiteness (2018) Available at:

<http://www.whiteswritingwhiteness.ed.ac.uk> (accessed 13 July 2018).

Woods D (1978) *Biko*. London: Paddington Press.